

# **ENGAGING CASUALLY EMPLOYED TEACHERS IN COLLABORATIVE CURRICULUM AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:**

**CHANGE THROUGH AN ACTION RESEARCH ENQUIRY IN  
A HIGHER EDUCATION 'PATHWAYS' INSTITUTION**

By

**MICHELLE SALMONA**

Graduate Certificate in University Learning and Teaching: UNSW

Graduate Certificate in Project Management: UTS

Masters in Business and Technology: UNSW

Student number 00101523

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of  
Technology, Sydney in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

2009

## **Certificate of Authorship and Originality**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Salmona". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'M'.

---

Signature of Michelle Salmona

## Acknowledgements

The task of undertaking a research study is an endeavour achieved with the contribution and support of family, friends and colleagues.

In this case I am indebted to many, with the following in particular:

- 
- 
- ❖ The participants in the study for making the whole process possible and fun.
  - ❖ My husband, my son and my parents, for loving me and encouraging me throughout this entire project. Above all, I would like to thank my husband, Dan, who ensured with food and countless cups of tea, that I kept going and completed this work.
  - ❖ My principal supervisor, Professor Alison Lee, for seeing my journey to completion and supporting me through the many ups and downs of the process. Also to my co-supervisor Dr. Jacquie Widin who was always encouraging as my reader and advisor. Ladies, without your wisdom and strength of purpose I would never had found my way through to the “finish line” - thank you.
  - ❖ Staff and students at the University of Technology, Sydney for general assistance with my study.
  - ❖ My professional colleagues, for their ongoing interest and sharing of their professional concerns that continue to inform my practice
- 
-

## Table of Contents

<b>CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP AND ORIGINALITY.....</b>	<b>(i)</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>(ii)</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>(iii)</b>
LIST OF FIGURES .....	(v)
LIST OF TABLES .....	(v)
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	(vi)
<b>RELATED PEER-REVIEWED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS ..</b>	<b>(vii)</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>(viii)</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH .....	2
1.2 DEFINING THE PROBLEMATIC .....	6
1.3 DESIGNING THE STUDY.....	9
1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH .....	10
1.5 WHAT I BRING TO THE RESEARCH .....	12
1.6 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS .....	16
<b>CHAPTER 2: ENGAGING WITH BODIES OF LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1 AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION.....	21
2.2 CURRICULUM AND LEARNING.....	28
2.3 COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITIES.....	33
2.4 EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT .....	39
2.5 ORGANISATIONAL DIMENSION .....	47
2.6 CONCLUSION .....	55
<b>CHAPTER 3: AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT.....</b>	<b>56</b>
3.1 CONCEPTUALISING ACTION RESEARCH.....	57
3.2 POSITIONING MYSELF IN THE ACTION RESEARCH.....	65
3.3 FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION .....	68
3.4 IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT .....	80
3.5 WORKING WITH THE DATA .....	85

3.6	CONCLUSION .....	95
<b>CHAPTER 4: ELABORATING THE ACTION RESEARCH</b>		
<b>PROCESS.....</b>		<b>96</b>
4.1	THE CDF WORKSHOPS .....	97
4.2	DEVELOPING THE MATERIALS .....	110
4.3	MANAGING THE CHANGE.....	113
4.4	CONCLUSION .....	119
<b>CHAPTER 5: BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF EDUCATIONAL</b>		
<b>PRACTICE: COLLABORATION, TENSION AND ALIGNMENT .....</b>		<b>121</b>
5.1	TENSIONS AND COMPLEXITIES.....	122
5.2	ENGAGEMENT .....	127
5.3	COLLABORATION .....	131
5.4	SHARED PRACTICES .....	136
5.5	LOST OPPORTUNITIES .....	140
5.6	NEW WAYS OF WORKING .....	144
5.7	CONCLUSION .....	150
<b>CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH REFLECTIONS .....</b>		<b>151</b>
6.1	DISTILLING THE OUTCOMES .....	151
6.2	THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS RESEARCH.....	153
6.3	FUTURE RESEARCH.....	159
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>		<b>164</b>
APPENDIX 1: WORKSHOP QUESTIONNAIRE.....		164
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....		165
APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS .....		166
APPENDIX 4: CODE BOOK FOR DATA SOURCE CITATIONS .....		167
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>		<b>168</b>

## ***List of Figures***

Figure 1: Complexity in the action research.....	63
Figure 2: Action Research Cycle.....	65
Figure 3: Mapping out the action research processes – first cycle.....	74
Figure 4: Mapping out the action research processes – second cycle .....	75
Figure 5: Cycles of the action research project .....	81
Figure 6: Looking at the data through an action research lens .....	89
Figure 7: Preferred key graduate outcomes for Stage 1 students .....	100
Figure 8: Mapping the assessment events .....	104
Figure 9: Stage 1 Assessment Timeline .....	107
Figure 10: Preferred key graduate outcomes for Stage 2 students .....	109
Figure 11: Tensions and Alignment in the Curriculum Development Project.....	124

## ***List of Tables***

Table 1: Dimensions of a Community of Practice .....	36
Table 2: Data Collection Summary .....	77
Table 3: Workshop Timeline .....	82
Table 4: Development plan.....	83
Table 5: Criteria for Assessing Research Quality .....	87
Table 6: Key graduate outcomes for the diploma.....	99
Table 7: Matrix of key outcomes for students for Stage 1 subjects .....	102
Table 8: Matrix of key outcomes for students for Stage 2 subjects .....	103

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AQF</b>	Australian Qualifications Framework
<b>AUQA</b>	Australian Universities Quality Agency
<b>CDF</b>	Curriculum Development Framework (Acronym for project at PCA to develop new curriculum for the Diploma of Communication)
<b>CoP</b>	Community of Practice
<b>HECS</b>	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>HEP</b>	Higher Education Provider
<b><i>HERD</i></b>	Higher Education Research & Development Journal
<b>HESA</b>	Higher Education Support Act 2003
<b>IDP</b>	IDP Education Pty Ltd
<b><i>IJAD</i></b>	International Journal for Academic Development
<b>IP</b>	Intellectual Property
<b>NSW</b>	New South Wales
<b>PCA</b>	The Pathways College of Australia
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b><i>SHE</i></b>	Studies in Higher Education Journal
<b><i>THE</i></b>	Teaching in Higher Education Journal
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UNS</b>	Unified National System
<b>UNSW</b>	University of New South Wales
<b>UTS</b>	University of Technology, Sydney
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training
<b>Data Citations</b>	The abbreviations for the citations of all data sources can be found in Appendix 4

## Related Peer-Reviewed Conference

### Presentations

---

---

Jackson, C., Salmona, M. and Kaczynski, D. (14 April, 2009) *Qualitative Methods Instruction: Promoting disciplined Inquiry through a critique of Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS)*. Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA

Kaczynski, D. and Salmona, M. (22 February 2009) *Action Research Evaluation Methods Using NVivo*. Annual meeting of the Southeast Evaluation Association, Tallahassee, FL, USA

Kaczynski, D. and Salmona, M. (7 November 2008) *Using NVivo to Improve Rigor in Evaluation*. Annual meeting of the American Evaluation Association, Denver, CO

Kaczynski, D. and Salmona, M. (28 February 2008) *Evaluation Design Decisions: NVivo software in action research, emergent inquiry and outcome structured inquiry*. Annual meeting of the Southeast Evaluation Association, Tallahassee, FL, USA

Kaczynski, D. and Salmona, M. (9 November 2007) *Evaluation Data Analysis: The Importance of Methodology when using Qualitative Data Analysis Software*. Annual meeting of the American Evaluation Association, Baltimore, MD

Salmona, M. (15 May 2007) *Professional development of teachers of university pathway programs: an action research study of a curriculum development framework*. Annual Teaching Qualitative Methods Conference Doctoral Research Forum, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Salmona, M. (9 April 2007) *Constructing and Evaluating a Model for Curriculum Development: Instilling an Organizational Culture of Educational Quality*. Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL

---

---



## Abstract

This thesis is an account of a curriculum reform initiative that took place in 2005 at the Pathways College of Australia (PCA) [a pseudonym]. It is an investigation of an innovative collaborative educational development project in an Australian higher education pathway institution. The research highlights the neglect of the professional development of casually employed teachers and makes contributions to the literatures of educational development, curriculum and collaboration. It suggests ways to improve quality in the current higher education context through a process of action research enquiry and organisational change

In recent times the higher education landscape in Australia has transformed with growing numbers of casual and part-time teachers, many more international students and an increasing focus on quality assurance. This changing context has led to the emergence of a number of private institutions providing an alternative entry pathway to tertiary study for students who do not meet standard university entrance requirements. The story of PCA and its growth during this time comes out of an increasing focus on quality and accountability underpinning the funding changes to, and the internationalisation of, higher education.

This study presents a curriculum development framework which engages casually employed teachers and supports curriculum reform. It addresses a need to ensure quality in the teaching and learning at PCA by developing an integrated curriculum. The framework allows for the professional development of casualised teaching staff in a pathways higher education institution and encourages a critical reflection on the process through action research. An exploration of the usefulness of communities of practice theory for examining the workings of this group-based educational development process frames the data analysis.

The research contributes to the literature by analysing how the participants engaged in the project cycles and illuminates the different ways in which they were working. Insights into curriculum reform are given through building collaboration under adverse conditions. The discussion adds a new dimension to communities of practice theory as it does not account for the important set of tensions found in the data. It furthers our understanding of its application in an environment with mostly casually employed teachers. The story about this research reveals the complexities in the relationships between the researcher, the participants and PCA and shows a successful collaboration can be achieved under challenging employment conditions.